

Preface

(Political scientists, like politicians, can occasionally discern the unavoidable when it is not too far ahead in the fog.) In a different perspective, however, the year that has intervened from the first to the present version of the manuscript has added a dimension of symbolic significance to this subject that may enhance its interest.

My subject is the origin, nature, and internal contradictions of a great national effort at social change conceived under the administration of John F. Kennedy and brought to fruition under that of Lyndon B. Johnson. When I first took it up, that effort seemed faltering, but the administration itself seemed securely in power, and the national initiatives begun in the early 1960's seemed likely to persist for something like their appointed time. But within twelve months it all had ended. The President had, in effect, resigned his office, giving as his reason the belief that his continued presence would only enhance the divisiveness and rising level of internal conflict that characterized the times. An administration that hardly months earlier had held out, and genuinely believed in, the prospect of unprecedented national consensus, a twentieth century era of good feeling that would heal at last some of the most serious of the many wounds that the American peoples have inflicted on one another in the course of forming the nation, was forced to leave office before further, more grievous—some would even predict fatal—injury was done. In the language of continental politics, the regime was toppled. Nothing quite like this had ever occurred in American history.

An incident in the spring of 1968 summed matters up. Seeking to attend the funeral of the Cardinal Archbishop of New York, the President of the United States arrived in the city under the cloak of "extraordinary secrecy," as the *New York Times* had it, and departed

*MAXIMUM
FEASIBLE
MISUNDERSTANDING*

THE CLARKE A. SANFORD LECTURES
ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNITY LIFE

A recipe for violence: Promise a lot; deliver a little. Lead people to believe they will be much better off, but let there be no dramatic improvement. Try a variety of small programs, each interesting but marginal in impact and severely underfinanced. Avoid any attempted solution remotely comparable in size to the dimensions of the problem you are trying to solve. Have middle-class civil servants hire upper-class student radicals to use lower-class Negroes as a battering ram against the existing local political systems; then complain that people are going around disrupting things and chastise local politicians for not cooperating with those out to do them in. Get some poor people involved in local decision-making, only to discover that there is not enough at stake to be worth bothering about. Feel guilty about what has happened to black people; tell them you are surprised they have not revolted before; express shock and dismay when they follow your advice. Go in for a little force, just enough to anger, not enough to discourage. Feel guilty again; say you are surprised that worse has not happened. Alternate with a little suppression. Mix well, apply a match, and run. . . .

—AARON WILDAVSKY

Daniel P. Moynihan

***MAXIMUM
FEASIBLE
MISUNDERSTANDING***

*Community Action
in the War on Poverty*

AN ARKVILLE PRESS BOOK



THE FREE PRESS, *New York*
COLLIER-MACMILLAN LIMITED, *London*

362.5
M93m
Cop. 2

Copyright © 1969 by The Free Press
A DIVISION OF THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved.
No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form
or by any means, electronic or mechanical,
including photocopying, recording,
or by any information storage and retrieval system,
without permission in writing from the Publisher.

Collier-Macmillan Canada, Ltd., Toronto, Ontario

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 69-18005

printing number
4 5 6 7 8 9 10

FOREWORD

Clarke A. Sanford of Margaretville, New York, sought to make local government more effective so that it could be responsive to human needs. Being oriented to the solution of human problems, he worked to make local government competent to this task. Equally important to him was the need to be solicitous of individual rights and liberties.

The columns of *The Catskill Mountain News*, which he edited and published for sixty years, were used not only to urge local governments to modernize, but to encourage Federal and state governments really to apply "creative federalism" all the way down to the local level. Having served as mayor of his small up-state New York village and as a member of numerous governmental and voluntary local, regional and

JAN 13 '70

HUNT LIBRARY
CARNEGIE-MELLON UNIVERSITY

Foreword

national boards, he fully appreciated the necessity and desirability of utilizing modern technology and methods to enrich the quality of rural life.

The Clarke A. Sanford Lectures on Local Government and Community Life, established at the State University Agricultural and Technical College at Delhi, New York, by his son, Roswell Sanford, and by his close friend, Armand G. Erpf, a senior partner of Loeb, Rhoades and Company, New York, will over the years encourage and promote scholarship and research in broad areas of local government and community life. This volume by Daniel P. Moynihan is the first of what will be a continuing series of books growing out of the Sanford Lectures. Each, we hope, will be a significant contribution to social science.

When Dr. Moynihan delivered the annual Clarke A. Sanford Lecture at the State University Agricultural and Technical College at Delhi, New York, in 1967, he discussed the "war on poverty." Since that time, events have unfortunately confirmed his view, which he has elaborated in this book.

Many of us who shared in the formation and the running of local community action agencies have been both frustrated and dismayed. What was to have been a "grass roots" war on poverty, sensitive and responsive to local need, emerged instead as a rigid program, directed all too frequently by inexperienced and arrogant bureaucrats who couldn't care less about local conditions and problems.

Why has the poverty program fallen so short of its goal? What went wrong? In the following pages, Dr. Moynihan provides a significant part of the answer. While some may take exception to his conclusions, others, like myself, having experienced the ordeal, will find themselves in substantial agreement. More important, however, is the lesson Dr. Moynihan contends

social science must consider if we are to profit from this ill-fated experience. To avoid similar pitfalls, social scientists must have more reliable data before advocating and insisting upon the adaption of theoretical solutions for social and economic ills. Tampering with the social and political processes without adequate objective data, as we have witnessed in the case of the poverty program, often leads to disastrous results.

Seldon M. Kruger

PROFESSOR AND CHAIRMAN
GENERAL STUDIES DIVISION
STATE UNIVERSITY AGRICULTURAL AND
TECHNICAL COLLEGE AT DELHI, NEW YORK

PREFACE

This essay was originally prepared as the Clarke A. Sanford Lecture on Local Government and Community Life and delivered at the Delhi Agricultural and Technical College of the State University of New York in the late spring of 1967. Although at that time the course of events leading to a downgrading of the community action programs of the "war on poverty" seemed already set—a theme of the lecture having been the near inevitability of this development, given the flawed beginnings of the program—a measure of prudence suggested that a published version await the final action of Congress on the Economic Opportunity Act of 1967. In a limited sense it can be said there was no need for such caution. Events proceeded much as could have been, and in this case was, anticipated.